

37 In 1981, at General Synod Thirteen in Rochester, New York delegates approved a Resolution On
38 Violence In Relation To Women. The Resolution read, in part, “Whereas the United Church of
39 Christ believes that the local church can provide sanctuary from the many forms of physical and
40 sexual violence experienced by women and others in American society through healing actions
41 of support for victims, and public policy education and advocacy; Whereas the United Church of
42 Christ recognizes that the climate of violence involving women is an urgent and present reality in
43 our society.” The Resolution went on to call for a pronouncement and proposal for action to be
44 considered at the following General Synod, and to call on churches and other parts of the United
45 Church of Christ to study the issue and to “minister with sensitivity to victims of violence.”

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47 In 1983, at General Synod Fourteen in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania the delegates were presented
48 with the Pronouncement and an accompanying Proposal For Action Related To The
49 Pronouncement On Violence In Relation To Women, recognizing the responsibility the church
50 has because of a history of mixed interpretation of biblical story and theological doctrine in
51 regard to women and children.

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53 The Pronouncement concludes by saying, “We are called as a Church to be a sanctuary for those
54 who are abused. Jesus foreshadowed this ministry in his story of the Good Samaritan, who cared
55 for one victimized by the violence of his society. Among us today the victims of violence and
56 abuse lie by the side of the road: beaten, humiliated, bruised, and exploited. Too often the
57 Church, like the Priest and the Levite of the Gospel story, has passed by on the other side. We
58 are called to be the Samaritan – to support, shelter, love, and heal those who are victims of
59 violence of this world.”

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61 Few other resolutions, pronouncements, or calls to action by General Synods have assumed and
62 affirmed the role of the church in supporting victims of rape and sexual violence: General Synod
63 Seventeen (1989, Fort Worth, Texas) adopted a Resolution In Support Of the Ecumenical
64 Decade Of Churches In Solidarity With Women; General Synod Nineteen (1993, St. Louis,
65 Missouri) adopted a Resolution On The Brutalization And Objectification Of Women In Times
66 Of War, particularly relating to the systematic use of rape as a means of terror and ethnic
67 cleansing during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina; General Synod Twenty-Nine (2013, Long
68 Beach, California) adopted a Resolution on Resisting Actions Seeking To Undermine The Status
69 Of Women In Society; and General Synod Thirty-One (2017, Baltimore, Maryland) adopted a
70 Resolution Of Witness In Support Of Adult Survivors Of Child Abuse and Neglect.

71 72 **Historical Background ~ Break The Silence Sunday**

73 Break The Silence Sunday was created in 2016 by the Rev Moira Finley (Wisconsin) as a
74 resource for churches to actively support survivors of sexual violence, particularly in the context
75 of worship. The goal is three-fold: to help congregations learn about the reality and scope of the
76 problem of sexual violence; to create communities where survivors can share their stories and be
77 received with hope and love; and for congregations to commit themselves to prayerfully consider
78 ways in which they can support survivors, be advocates for change in their communities, and
79 around the world. Materials, available each February, include complete liturgies, prayers,
80 scripture reflections, sermon suggestions, music resources, statistics, ideas about talking to and
81 with children and teens, and the Break The Silence Sunday Clergy Commitment. Resources and
82 a historical archive are added to the website (breakthesilencesunday.org) each year as well.

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84 Reaffirming the Spirit present in these documents, lifting up the Biblical witness to compassion
85 and courage, and responding to the crisis in our contemporary society, we call upon General
86 Synod for a new and vital ministry of care and advocacy for survivors of sexual violence, and
87 forthright prophecy to a society which hides, belittles or condones such abuse.
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89 **Biblical and Theological Background**

90 The scriptural testimony of Genesis (1.26-27, 5.1-2, 9.6) as well as Psalm 8.3-8, James 3.9 and
91 others declare that all humanity is created in the very image of God, the human body being holy
92 and sacred. Following in this scriptural tradition, the theology and practice of the United Church
93 of Christ affirms the sacredness of all bodies. Violations of any human body, particularly the
94 intimate nature of the violation of rape and sexual violence, are therefore violations against the
95 image and body of God.
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97 In addition, the testimony of 2 Corinthians 5.17 declares that through faith in Jesus Christ we are
98 all a new creation, and in numerous healing stories in the Gospels (Matthew 9.20-22, Mark 5.25-
99 34, Mark 10.46-52, Luke 17.11-19, and Luke 18.35-43) Jesus reaches out to those who are in
100 need of healing and hope with the words, “your faith has made you whole”. Speaking the truth of
101 our stories is a part of what can save us, can restore our bodies and our relationships with God
102 and with others. The community of the church can offer a powerful place for stories to be told
103 and honored, and for healing to begin, but only if the church is willing and able to listen.
104 Survivors need the listening heart of the church’s community to support them in their healing
105 journey.
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107 Finally, in Judges 19 the story of rape and violence ends with a clear call to the faithful to,
108 “Consider it, take council, and speak out” (Judges 19.30). The church is called to nurture and
109 care for those who suffer at the hands of others, and to speak out about injustice. Instead of
110 supporting the wounded, the church has perpetuated theologies that do additional damage,
111 including those that glorify suffering, leave survivors believing they should stay in abusive
112 relationships, and advocate for unconditional forgiveness of perpetrators. Too often, historically,
113 the church has chosen silence when face to face with survivors of sexual violence instead of
114 bravely and courageously supporting and nurturing survivors, and speaking out against the
115 violence that was perpetrated against them.
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117 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

118
119 WHEREAS, in the more than thirty years since General Synod Fourteen the church has made
120 little progress in truly supporting survivors of rape and sexual violence;
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122 WHEREAS, survivors of rape and sexual violence are hesitant to come forward and share their
123 stories with clergy or congregations because of theologies that perpetuate, glorify, or even
124 encourage suffering and that advocate quick and uncomplicated forgiveness;
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126 WHEREAS, the church often perpetuates the victim blaming and shaming, mirroring the painful
127 doubt and disbelief survivors face in the wider society, and contributes to the rape culture in
128 which we all live;

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WHEREAS, due to the intensely personal nature of the crimes, the relationships that often exist between perpetrator and victim, and the challenges of the criminal justice system, the scope of rape and sexual violence is difficult to measure.

WHEREAS, it is estimated that every ninety-eight seconds someone in the United States is sexually assaultedⁱ;

WHEREAS, the most conservative statistics estimate that one in every six women and one in every thirty-three men in the United States will be the victim of an attempted or completed sexual assault in their lifetime and that an estimated 63,000 children are sexually abused each year.

WHEREAS, we are in the midst of a cultural transformation, in the United States and around the world, with the *#metoo* movement empowering survivors to come forward and share their stories of rape, abuse, sexual harassment, and other sexual violence;

WHEREAS, with the testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee by Dr. Christine Blasey Ford during the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, the United States has clearly seen the challenges survivors face in coming forward with their stories, particularly after many years of carrying those stories in silence;

WHEREAS, the backlash many survivors face after telling their stories often forces them back into silence and fear, and frequently complicates or damages healing already accomplished;

WHEREAS, the scriptural testimony of Genesis (1.26-27, 5.1-2, and 9.6) along with Psalm 8.3-8, James 3.9 and others affirm that humanity is created in the very image of God;

WHEREAS, in Judges 19 the story of rape and violence ends with a clear call to the faithful to, “Consider it, take council, and speak out” (Judges 19.30);

WHEREAS, in numerous healing stories in the Gospels (Matthew 9.20-22, Mark 5.25-34, Mark 10.46-52, Luke 17.11-19, Luke 18.35-43) Jesus, reaching out to those in need who have come to him for healing and hope, declares “your faith has made you whole”, recognizing that the speaking the truth of our stories can save us;

WHEREAS, the scriptural testimony of 2 Corinthians 5.17 declares that through faith in Jesus Christ we are all a new creation;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty Second General Synod calls upon the national church leadership, Conferences, Associations, and local churches to speak out in support of survivors of rape and sexual violence, offer care to individuals, including silent supportive witness in courtrooms, and advocate for sexual violence prevention education;

173 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the national setting of the United Church of Christ add a
174 yearly observance of Break The Silence Sunday (BTSS) to its calendar with the suggested date
175 of the fourth Sunday of April so as to occur within national sexual assault awareness month;
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177 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that local churches be invited to participate in a yearly
178 observance of Break The Silence Sunday, honoring within their worship contexts the stories and
179 struggles of survivors of rape and sexual violence, and encourage such an observance in the
180 ecumenical community;
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182 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that all settings of the United Church of Christ be encouraged to
183 educate clergy and laity on how to support survivors of rape and sexual violence including
184 trauma-informed care, and to advocate on behalf of those not yet ready to speak openly so that
185 the voices of survivors do not speak alone.
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187 FUNDING

188 Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall
189 mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.
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191 IMPLEMENTATION

192 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within
193 the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.
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ⁱ Information gathered by the National Crime Victimization Survey, the United States Department of Justice, the United States Department of Health and Human Services as well as other governmental and non-profit organizations via the Rape Abuse Incest National Network, RAINN; for further information on statistics and the prevalence of sexual violence visit <https://www.rainn.org/about-sexual-assault>